



Department of Planning, Housing, & Community Development

Mayor, Matthew T. Ryan
Director, Tarik Abdelazom

Date: 7 February 2013
To: Commission on Architecture & Urban Design Members
From: H. Peter L'Orange, Historic Preservation and Neighborhood Planner
Subject: **135 Washington Street – Emergency Escape Ladder**
Tax ID: 160.40-2-33
Case: CAUD 2013-06
Copies: T. Costello; J. Tuttle; file

A. Review Requested

On 7 February 2013, Jamie Tuttle, the property owner, submitted an application for Design Review for the property located at 135 Washington Street. The property is a contributing property in the Court Street Local and Nation Register Historic District, and all exterior modifications need to be reviewed and approved by the Commission on Architecture and Urban Design (CAUD).

B. Proposal

In March 2011, the Applicant obtained approval from the Planning Commission to convert the upper floors of the building to residential. Subsequent to this approval, it was determined that the fourth floor could not be occupied for residential use due to the ingress/egress requirements of the New York State Building Code. In August 2011, the Applicant applied to CAUD for exterior stairs on the front façade of the building; this application was denied. In September 2012, the Applicant presented a retractable ladder concept to CAUD under the “Other Business” portion of the meeting. Since that time, the Applicant has submitted a request to the State of New York to allow the use of a retractable ladder to meet the egress requirements. The Applicant is now seeking approval from CAUD for the retractable ladder.

The ladder is a JOMY Retractable Ladder. When the ladder is closed, it measures 5.25 inches wide by 7.25 inches deep; it would extend from the ground to the top of the building. The Applicant has not specified a color; however, the ladder can be painted any color.

C. Property History and Condition

Year of Construction	1926
Land Use	Commercial
Architect	H. R. Tiffany
Significance	The building is one of the few 20 th Century structures in the Court Street Historic District, but it was designed to be complementary with the surrounding buildings and is considered to be a contributing structure to the district. The decorative features, most specifically the brickwork,

suggest an architectural reference to the Georgian Revival style. This makes use of pattern brickwork, leaded glass transoms, and an ocular window at the top of the peaked front façade. New window openings with modern windows were installed in the southern façade in 2011.

The building was originally home to Griffis Greenhouse (1929-1932). From 1933 to 1935, the building was vacant; the Select Furniture Company arrived in 1935 and stayed until 1941. The building was vacant again from 1941 to 1945. The most recent business, Carver's Heating and Appliances, was at this location since 1946. The first floor was modernized in ca. 1945-1950, and it is likely the second-story window was replaced at the same time. The rear stair-tower is either original or a very early addition.

D. Staff Findings

Staff has found a precedent for the use of retractable ladders on historic buildings in California. When closed, the ladder is similar in appearance to a drainpipe.

The Commission should consider the placement and color of the ladder as part of any potential decision. The Commission may wish to require that the Applicant paint the ladder the same color as the brick of the building to minimize its visual impact. The Applicant has not specified on which side of the building the ladder will be installed. Placement on the northern side of the façade might result in less of a visual impact overall, at the Brunner Building (137 Washington Street) is higher than the Carver building and the ladder profile would be on an interior corner of the building. The southern side of the façade might be more visible overall, as it is an exterior corner; however, the street level façade of the Salvation Army building projects out from the building façade and would help to camouflage the ladder at the pedestrian level. The south side of the façade has the additional "benefit" of having holes already drilled in the façade; installation on the ladder on this side would at least keep the impacts on a single side of the building instead of having holes on both sides. If the Commission elects to go with the south side, the Commission may wish to request/require the Applicant to fill the existing holes, assuming they cannot be reused; the Applicant will have to be up working on that part of the building anyway, so this might be an appropriate and convenient time to make some quick repairs.

Per the manufacture's installation instructions, the ladder needs to be installed within ten (10) inches of the window; this can be done on either the north or south side of the building façade.

E. Photographs



